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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Norwegian Refugee Council, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 June 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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IDMC's written statement for the 38th session of the Human Rights Council panel discussion on the human rights of internally displaced persons in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Your Excellencies, the Special Rapporteur, distinguished members of the panel. Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement today.

The 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles provides an important opportunity to reflect on the progress made since their publication in 1998, which marked a high point in international recognition of the need to prevent internal displacement and to provide protection to internally displaced people. For twenty years, the Principles have provided a critical normative framework, underpinning efforts to develop regional and national laws and policies on internal displacement. The Kampala Convention is one notable regional development, and we look forward to marking the ten-year anniversary of the Convention next year. Laws and policies play a hugely important role in setting norms and creating and promoting accountability to citizens. But in and of themselves, they are not enough to deal with this complex issue, in the absence of state will or capacity to implement them.

In the last twenty years, we have not seen substantial reductions in the numbers of internally displaced people. Protracted displacement situations are worsening. Conflict and violence, extreme weather and disasters are driving some of the highest rates of internal displacement the world has seen. In our most recent global report, we recorded 30.6 million new internal displacements by conflict and disasters in 2017, and 40 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence at the end of that year. These are shocking numbers, and behind them lies the terrible toll internal displacement take on individuals and communities. Further, given data challenges, they are also likely to be an underestimate.

The persistently high numbers of new displacements, and the increasingly protracted nature of internal displacement worldwide, clearly demonstrate that we must find new approaches to this problem. A failure to plan for or prevent all forms of displacement will undermine progress toward a number of SDGs, and toward the full realisation of human rights.

In recent years, the collective will required to address internal displacement has been largely absent. The 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles has generated new momentum, and we are heartened at the actions taken in 2018, such as development of the GP20 Plan of Action. But ongoing high-level engagement will be required to ensure that the various initiatives of 2018 do not fade away, and this must include the substantive engagement of those states most affected by internal displacement, and of internally displaced people themselves. We must also support states to implement the kinds of policies and programs that will reduce new displacement and resolve protracted situations while keeping human rights at the forefront of response.

And we should remember that prevention is also critical in safeguarding rights. Today, we see the ways in which Fiji has led the way in mainstreaming gender and human rights into its participatory consultation process when developing displacement relocation guidelines. We can, unfortunately, expect more forced displacements, both internal and cross-border, as the impacts of climate change become more acute.

The international community should do more to support states in implementing these sorts of planning processes, which, in aiming to reduce the impacts of disasters and preparing for orderly movements, can safeguard against rights violations and ensure the perspectives of vulnerable groups are included in the decisions which affect them. We need to bolster support to the more forward-looking regional migration policies, something both the Pacific region as well as Central America are advocating for, from different starting points, but with similar perspectives.

Building a solid evidence base is critical both to ensuring protection for IDPs, and informing planning and prevention efforts. To fully address the drivers and impacts of displacement, and deliver the kind of actions needed to prevent and reduce it, we must do more to understand its long-term economic and development impacts on IDPs, the communities they live in, and on states.

Looking beyond the numbers (though getting good numbers will always be critical), we must find comprehensive ways to track and assess how IDPs' needs and vulnerabilities evolve over time, and what works and what doesn't in addressing internal displacement in different contexts. We must strive to better understand the links between internal displacement and cross-border flight, build a stronger understanding of the specific characteristics of urban displacement, and find new ways to account for the effects of climate change, the interplay of slow-onset disasters and conflict, and the role of development projects and criminal violence in driving displacement. This is a research agenda that IDMC has committed to in 2018 and beyond.

We thank the panel again for the fascinating discussion and look forward to constructive collaboration and engagement with you in the future.